Gunanidhi, Dama and Kubera

Yajnadatta

Yajnadatta, a Vedanta scholar and a priest by profession, lives in Kampilya. He imparts all his knowledge and passes on all his sanskaars to his son Gunanidhi. But sadly, Gunanidhi turns into a gambler. He does not accompany his father when he performs ceremonies in other people's houses. He excuses himself by citing some reason or the other.

When Yajnadatta's wife comes to know about Gunanidhi's wayward ways, she tries to make him see reason. But Gunanidhi pays no heed to her. She knows that Yajnadatta will never tolerate Gunanidhi's ways. So whenever Yajnadatta enquires about Gunanidhi she lies about his whereabouts and keeps mum about his activities.

Time passes. Yagnadatta gets Gunanidhi married. Yagnadatta's wife hopes he will reform at least after marriage. But Gunanidhi is steeped in debt by now. So he starts stealing the precious things from his home to repay his gambling debts.

One day, Yajnadatta goes to a rich man's house to perform a ceremony. He looks at the man with surprise and says, "From where did you get this ring?" The man says, "Your son sold this ring to me to pay his gambling debts." Yajnadatta is heartbroken.

He confronts his wife but his wife as usual lies to him. Yajnadatta loses his temper and says, "What liars and cheats my wife and son are. I trusted and respected you both. And this is how you have repaid my goodness. I will eat my next meal only when I marry another woman." And true to his words, he marries another priest's daughter the very same evening.

Gunanidhi

When Gunanidhi hears about this, he runs away from Kampilya. But he realizes that he cannot run away from his hunger. His tears do not satiate the pangs of hunger that have set his stomach on fire. He sits down under

a shady tree, weary to the bone, not knowing what fate holds in store for him.

As the sun sets, several bhaktas come there with sweets and fruits. They offer it all to the Shiva Linga that is enshrined in a temple near the tree. Gunanidhi eyes the sweets greedily. He waits for them to finish praying with the hope that he can feast on what they have offered to the Lord.

But the bhaktas start reciting Shiva's thousand names. They then start singing and dancing. He stares at them in utter disbelief when after doing all this they sleep outside the temple itself. Gunanidhi creeps into the temple when they finally start dozing.

He cannot see the food he has come to steal. So he raises the wick of the lamp to increase the brightness around the sanctum sanctorum. He grabs the sweets and rushes outside. And promptly steps on a sleeping bhakta who screams out in pain. When the other bhaktas see the prasad in Gunanidhi's hands, they beat him to death.

Yama's dutas arrive to take Gunanidhi's soul. But Shiva's ganas stop them and say, "Gunanidhi's soul belongs to us. Don't you dare touch it." Yama's dutas are amazed to hear this. They say, "Gunanidhi was a cheat and a gambler. Yesterday he stole the offerings of Shiva too. And you want us to spare him. Explain yourselves first."

The Shiva ganas say, "Gunanidhi fasted on Shivaratri, heard the sacred KotiRudra, brightened the dimming lamp inside the sanctorum and ensured that no shadow fell on our Lord's Linga. That is reason enough for him to accompany us." So Yama's dutas release Gunanidhis soul from their noose and allow the ganas to take it to Shiva's loka.

Dama

Gunanidhi is reborn as Dama, the king of Kalinga. Dama, an ardent Shiva bhakta asks the people of Kalinga to light lamps in their homes and temples every evening without fail. So Kalinga glows. Always.

One day Dama goes to Kasi, sanctifies a Linga and starts worshipping Shiva with great fervour. Shiva and Parvati are pleased with his penance and appear before him in a dazzling light. Dama cannot see his Lord Shiva or Uma through such radiance. So he squeezes his eyes shut.

Shiva says, “Dama, ask for a boon. I’ll grant it to you.” Dama says, “Bless me with the ability to look at you without blinking my eyes." Shiva grants him his wish. Dama feasts his eyes on Shiva to his heart’s content first.

But Dama is Gunanidhi after all. He then stares at Parvati and smiles at her wickedly with mixed emotions. He feels jealous, gets attracted to her and wonders what kind of tapasya she performed to stand so close to Shiva. He voices his thoughts aloud. And stares at Shakti for such a long time that his left eye bursts in his face. Unfazed about his, he starts staring at her with his right eye.

Parvati loses her temper, looks at Shiva and says, “Who is this horrible man who stares so wickedly at me? Why is he so jealous of me?” Shiva laughs loudly and says, “He is your son, O Uma. He is Gunanidhi reborn as Dama. He is neither envious nor strange. He is praising you in the manner he knows best. That is all.”

Kubera

Shiva looks at Dama indulgently and says, “Dama, you shall be the master of Alaka, the mountain city where Yakshas, Guhyakas and the Kinnaras live. You will also be the guardian of the nine treasures. Gunanidhi, the woman standing before you is none other than your mother Uma. Take her blessing and go your way.”

Gunanidhi falls at Parvati’s feet. Parvati understands that Shiva’s bhaktas express their bhakti to them in their own unique way. But she has her say too. She looks at Gunanidhi and says, “Shiva feels you are his true bhakta. He will stay close to you in Kailash. Shiva will also ensure that you gain fame as Kubera, the lord of wealth.

But you will be known as Ekaksipingala since your left eye burst. That eye of yours will always be yellow. Also, you will have a twisted body since you stared at me so openly. And your vahana will be a Nara, a man.

For you, Kubera, will tower over them, overwhelm them and cloud their thinking. And only when the Naras invoke my Shakti will they be blessed with my divine vision which will help them look at their wealth with the right perspective and in its true dimensions."

The sleeping man on the inverted lotus signifies our ignorance, ego and attachment to Kubera. At a basic level, we are so embroiled in the pursuit of wealth that we forget to nurture our souls. For whether we like it or not we do need money to survive. But often, even when our most basic needs are satiated, instead of being content with what we have we get carried away by the material pleasures, power, identity, fame and recognition that are associated with our wealth.

Perhaps that is why Shakti made Nara Kubera's vahan – to tell us that we should always strike a balance between Gunanidhi- the gambler and Kubera – the hoarder of wealth, between Alaka – a city of opulence and Kailash – a cold snowy mountain top, between Shiva - who has no hunger and symbolizes detachment and Kubera - who is always hungry and symbolizes attachment. Shakti obviously knows what she is doing for the Nara. For us. It's up to us to do what we should and must. Always.